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ABSTRACT

A study examined the job performance of high school graduates in entry-level jobs versus the job performance of nongraduates in entry-level jobs. An 11-item survey was randomly distributed to 100 businesses located in the area served by the Greenville County School District, South Carolina. Employers completed a survey for each employee who met the stated criteria: employees must be between 17 and 21 years of age and hired after June 1, 1988. Data from employees who had completed high school were compared with data from those who had not completed high school to determine whether there was a statistical difference in job performance between the two groups. Of the 1,000 surveys, 165 were returned. Compiled data were converted to percentages of satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for the high school graduate employees and compared to the satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for the nongraduate employees. Employers rated performances of entry-level employees who had graduated from high school as more satisfactory. Results contradicted the current notion that the South Carolina public school system is not producing high school graduates who performed satisfactorily in entry-level jobs. (YLB)

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HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES: HOW DO THEY PERFORM IN ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS?

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the job performance of high school graduates in an entry-level job versus the job performance of non-high school graduates in entry level jobs. This study was conducted using an eleven-item survey that was randomly distributed to one hundred businesses located in the area served by the Greenville County School District. The results reject the current attitude that the South Carolina public school system is not producing high school graduates who perform satisfactory in entry-level jobs.

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Greenville Public School System, the largest school district in South Carolina, was producing graduates equipped with training necessary to perform satisfactorily in an entry-level job as compared with the employee who did not graduate. At a 1982 public hearing on education and work, employers expressed concern that high school graduates were not prepared for the jobs in the workplace (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1982). To determine if this widely held assumption is

valid, it was necessary to obtain data from employers relative to job performance of high school graduates compared with that of non-high school graduates. The largest segment of the American work force consists of high school graduates who have not attended college (Panel on Secondary School Education for the Changing Workplace, 1984). It is imperative that the public school systems prepare its students with the training necessary to meet the demands of today's work environment. Researchers agree that two broad kinds of skills are required on the job - - basic skills (the three Rs), and interpersonal and social skills that facilitate job adaptability. Furthermore, studies indicate that employers value interpersonal skills as much as basic skills. There has been no research, however, which directly compares the job performance of the entry-level employee who is a high school graduate with the job performance of the employee who did not complete high school. An overall review of the available literature does not confirm or discredit the assumption that the public schools are not equipping their graduates with the skills necessary to function successfully in today's entry-level job market.

The purpose of this study is to determine the direction of the relationship between employees with high school diplomas and job performance compared to employees without high school diplomas and job performance. The research method consisted of the development of a survey instrument and the selection of subjects followed by the collection of data to assess the correlation or absence of

correlation between the dependent and independent variables.

Names of businesses and industries were obtained from local Chambers of Commerce and the researchers randomly selected from these lists employers who employed twenty-five or more persons. One hundred employers were selected, contacted and surveyed. Employers were asked to complete a survey of each of their employees who met the stated criteria: employees must be between 17 and 21 years of age and hired after June 1, 1988.

All surveys were then returned to the researchers for assessment. Returned surveys were divided into two groups: Group A - those employees who had completed high school and Group B - those employees who had not completed high school. The data gathered from both groups was then compared to determine if there was a statistical difference in job performance between the two groups. The compiled data was converted to percentages of satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for the high school graduate employees and compared to the satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for the non-high school graduate employees.

FINDINGS

One hundred and sixty five of the one thousand surveys were returned. The responses on the surveys were compiled and the results were recorded in Table I. The percentages of satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for high

school graduates and the percentages of satisfactory and unsatisfactory responses for non-high school graduates were compared to determine the direction of the relationship between job performance and high school graduation.

Based upon the data this study clearly indicates that employers rate performances of entry-level employees who have graduated from high school as more satisfactory than performances of entry-level employees who have not graduated from high school. For each of the eleven items in the survey, the percentage of employees that received a satisfactory rating was at least fifteen points higher for those who had graduated from high school as compared to the satisfactory rating for those who had not graduated. The mean difference between the percentages of satisfactory responses for high school graduates and satisfactory responses for non-graduates was 28.72.

The results give some evidence to support the contention that differences between works may indeed be due to educational experience. The results also illustrate consistently high percentages in the satisfactory category for high school graduates for both basic skills (items 1-5) and social skills (items 6-9).

IMPLICATIONS

While the results of this survey are encouraging, it is evident that more research addressing this issue is warranted. This information has direct implications for the public school systems of South Carolina, their boards of

education, their administrators, and their teachers. The research suggests the public schools are producing graduates competent to perform satisfactorily in entry-level jobs which should add credibility and overall support for South Carolina school districts. This research should also give incentive to school-business partnership programs to expand as positive relationships between high school graduates and job performance are demonstrated.

This research suggests that the commonly-held perception that the public schools are not adequately preparing graduates for satisfactory performance in the workplace, may be in part, invalid in the Greenville area. Clearly more research is needed in the Greenville area and statewide to adequately address the issue of how well South Carolina's public school districts prepares their graduates for entry-level jobs in today's complex economic system.

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE OF SATISFACTORY AND UNSATISFACTORY RESPONSES FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES AND NON-HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES BY THE EMPLOYEERS

SKILL/ABILITY	SATISFACTORY		UNSATISFACTORY	
	Grad	Non-grad	Grad	Non-grad
Ability to understand written direction	97.3	60.4	2.9	39.6
Ability to express information in writing	91.2	56.9	8.8	43.1
Ability to perform math computations	90.3	47.1	9.7	52.9
Ability to solve problems	85.3	48.1	14.7	51.9
Ability to follow directions	95.2	72.7	4.5	27.3
Ability to communicate orally	94.5	72.7	5.5	27.3
Ability to accept responsibility	82.7	67.2	17.3	32.8
Exhibits a cooperative attitude	92.7	68.3	7.3	31.7
Exhibits self-motivation	77.2	49.1	22.8	50.9
Absences from work	92.7	69.1	7.3	30.9
Late arrivals to work	85.5	70.6	14.5	29.4

Ratings: Satisfactory - meets job requirements
Unsatisfactory - does not meet job requirements